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Original Article

Women's Representation and Electoral System Reform in Papua New Guinea: The Limitations of Limited Preferential Voting

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Abstract

Papua New Guinea moved to a limited preferential voting (LPV) system prior to the 2007 national election. The shift from first-past-the-post to preferential voting was intended to encourage the election of candidates with broader mandates from constituents; to reverse the trend of increasing election-related violence; and to lead to more cooperation between candidates and voting blocs. It was also anticipated that instituting a preferential system would increase the electoral chances of female candidates. This article looks at the impact of the LPV system on women's participation and performances as candidates in Papua New Guinean elections since 2002, focusing in particular on the three general elections in 2007, 2012 and 2017. It argues that the benefits of LPV have not outweighed its costs, at least in terms of women's participation and representation. This demonstrates the limits of institutional reform of this nature in tackling deep-seated issues relating to political culture.

Key words: Papua New Guinea, electoral reform, women's representation, elections, political participation

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1. Introduction

Papua New Guinea moved to a limited preferential voting (LPV) system prior to the 2007 national election. The shift from first-past-the-post (FPP) to a preferential system was intended to encourage the election of candidates with broader mandates from constituents; to reverse the trend of increasing election-related violence; and to lead to more cooperation between candidates and voting blocs (Kaiulo 2002; Reilly 2006). It was expected that LPV would make elections more expensive and counting much slower (Kaiulo 2002; Standish 2002), and these predictions have been borne out (Haley & Zubrinich 2013; Howes 2014). There have also been unintended consequences of the shift to LPV, including the proliferation of vote buying and gifting in campaigns (Haley & Zubrinich 2015).

One anticipated result of the shift to LPV was that it would increase the chances of female candidates (May, Wheen & Haley 2013). Women's political representation has always been low in Papua New Guinea—the number of women in Parliament has ranged from zero to three since independence, and women have always made up less than 3 per cent of parliamentarians. It was hoped by some that LPV would prompt a sea change in the fortunes of women candidates, with women gaining further chances in the electoral contest through the collection of preferences, as opposed to the winner-takes-all plurality system under FPP.

For those who had hoped women's representation would increase following the

electoral system change, results have been disappointing. Women's representation since the advent of LPV has followed the inconsistent pattern of previous elections, with small gains offset by significant setbacks. After three general elections using LPV, Papua New Guinea has no women in its national parliament, placing it among the worst in the world in terms of women's representation. While electoral system reform was never going to be a panacea for the issue of women's under-representation in Papua New Guinea politics, it does not seem to have helped women's electoral chances at all beyond a few isolated cases in 2012. In fact, this article argues that some of the unintended consequences of LPV—specifically, the increasing prevalence of money politics—have actually disadvantaged many female candidates, who are effectively priced out of politics due to limited financial resources.

This article looks at the impact of the LPV system on women's participation and performances as candidates in Papua New Guinean elections since 2002.¹ To do this, it utilises a theoretical framework of historical institutionalism, to track how the electoral system reform process has been shaped by embedded rules and norms (Steinmo & Thelen 1992). These institutions of course impact, and are impacted by, gender and gender relations. The subfield of feminist institutionalism has explored these gendered impacts in various political settings (Krook & Mackay 2011).

The next section evaluates political culture and women's political participation in Papua New Guinea. The following section looks at the electoral system history and the LPV debate. Then, the participation of women, and success of women candidates, in the three national general elections since the

introduction of LPV, in 2007, 2012 and 2017 is examined. The concluding section makes the case that the benefits of LPV have not outweighed its costs, at least in terms of women's participation and representation. This demonstrates the limits of institutional reform of this nature in tackling deep-seated issues relating to political culture.

2. Political culture and women's political participation

Papua New Guinean politics is intensely local, with personal relationships and local issues prioritised over national interest. The localised nature of politics sustains the fragmentation of the political system, characterised by high turnover—around 50 per cent in each national election—and a weak party system (Seib 2000). In this political context, kinship and largesse are key determinants of electoral behaviour, with party affiliation largely irrelevant in voter choice (Anere 2000; Ketan 2004; Saffu 1996). Patron–client political relationships abound, and the primary role of a politician is increasingly seen as project management of service delivery infrastructure projects within their constituency rather than their parliamentary duties (Ketan 2007; Rynkiewicz 2000).

The primacy of patronage politics is often explained with reference to customary 'big-man' political organisation (Rynkiewicz 2000; Sahlins 1963) and traditions of gift-giving. Yet, as Ketan (2004, 2007) notes, culture is often manipulated in these political practices in a manner which ignores the transparency and accountability measures employed in cultural exchanges, and cultural explanations often generalise and oversimplify traditional models of leadership. Political culture has undoubtedly evolved in the postcolonial era; the 'individual MP has become a "super big-man", creating a level of politics that has eclipsed and/or swallowed other modes of local political activity' (Stewart & Strathern 1998, 134).

Gender necessarily impacts political and electoral behaviour in Papua New Guinea. Women have continuously been under-represented in formal politics, at both national and

1. For this research, I have drawn on the significant body of work around elections and electoral reform in Papua New Guinea. I am particularly indebted to the material from international and domestic observation projects for the 2007, 2012 and 2017 elections. In 2017, I was involved in the ANU-SSGM Domestic Observation Project of the national elections, and this experience informs my analysis. I am very grateful for the work of Terence Wood in creating the PNG Elections Database (<http://devpolicy.org/pngelections/>), an invaluable resource.

subnational levels. The political sphere is viewed as an inherently masculine domain, a perspective reinforced by dominant cultural and religious beliefs on gender relations where women are expected to play a background role in public affairs. Voting, based as it often is on familial and kinship obligations, is a process in which many women are expected to follow the lead of a family or community leader:

In respect of 'recalcitrant' women—regardless of whether they are highly educated, 'liberated', or whatever the case might be—a blow over the ear with a pointed knuckle is usually a sufficient physical reminder that good Hagen wives should always vote the same way as their husbands. (Ketan 2004, 79).

This pressure can be implicit or explicit, with female voters generally reported higher levels of intimidation in casting their vote (Haley & Zubrinich 2013).

There is a history of women's electoral activism in Papua New Guinea, led by groups such as the National Council of Women and Women in Politics, and focused on promoting the election of more women. Efforts include workshops for aspiring female candidates in the lead-up to general or local level elections, a practice that goes back to at least 1997 (Anere 2000; Sepoe 2002). Women's groups have supported electoral reform to increase the number of female candidates and/or politicians, including the push for reserved seats for women in the 2007–2012 parliamentary term. Lobbying efforts secured a provision in the Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government that mandates nominated seats for women on provincial assemblies and local councils, and a provision in the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates that provides financial incentives for parties to endorse female candidates.

While these efforts have seen some success, institutional measures to guarantee women's political representation, especially the reserved seats initiative, have faced significant public and political resistance within Papua New Guinea (Baker 2014). Even where reforms to encourage women's participation in politics

have been implemented, existing institutions have proved resistant to substantive change. Curtin (2018) writes that 'informal institutions that are less codified and often related to culture, colonisation, and clientelism ... derive their longevity from societal institutions with significant cultural capital' (see also Bjarnegård 2013). These informal norms can resist or subvert the aims of reforms.

3. The limited preferential voting debate in Papua New Guinea

The value of holding elections is generally uncontested in democratic politics; the method of voting in those elections, however, is often a topic of much debate. Colonial legacies play a significant role in determining electoral processes in the Pacific region, and some systems have remained unchanged since independence. Yet electoral system reform offers an opportunity to engineer for (or against) certain outcomes.

Papua New Guinea, at the time a territory of Australia, used an alternative vote (AV) electoral system in elections in 1964, 1968 and 1972. After independence in 1975, the decision was made to shift to a FPP system prior to the 1977 election. The rationale for this change was that FPP was less complex for voters and counting staff while being similar enough to the previous system—in that voters were electing an individual representative to represent their geographical area in Parliament—to prevent confusion.

Reilly (2002, p.165) labelled the decision to adopt FPP 'a move that had devastating consequences for the nascent political system'. The FPP system was in place for six national general elections. In that time, candidate numbers grew exponentially from 869 to 2,818 and from an average of 8.1 per constituency in 1977 to 25.9 in 2002 (Reilly 2002). Relatedly, the share of the vote won by winning candidates was declining; in the last general election held using FPP, the average vote share of successful candidates was under 20 per cent, and one candidate won his seat with just 6 per cent of the vote (Standish 2006). As Seib (2000, 7)

put it, under FPP 'most people's votes are cast to the wind'. Some policymakers and academics, including Reilly, actively promoted a shift to a different voting system. While other systems were considered, preferential voting was considered to be a way of achieving broader mandates for representatives while maintaining single-member constituencies.

Thus, the LPV system came about. The system is 'limited' in that voters only distribute preferences to three candidates rather than ranking all candidates as in other preferential voting systems. This was considered important as it reduced the complexity of the new electoral system for voters in a country with relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy.

A key objective of the shift to LPV was engineering stronger mandates for elected members of Parliament. The use of preferential voting would in theory facilitate the election of candidates with wider support bases (Okole 2005; Reilly 1996). An assumption was that this would create a 'better' class of politicians, potentially decreasing the high levels of incumbent turnover at each election, usually around 50 per cent. A campaign run by Transparency International PNG in 2001 claimed that LPV would result in the election of members of Parliament (MPs) of a higher calibre (Standish 2006). It was also suggested that LPV would reduce the number of candidates over time (Anere 2000; Reilly 1996).

It was predicted that LPV would lead to less violence and greater cooperation between candidates (Reilly 1996, 2002). Reducing election-related violence was a key concern, as the 2002 election had been described as the worst in Papua New Guinea's history, with widespread violence and failed elections declared in six electorates. It was also claimed that under LPV, candidates would be incentivised to reach out to voters beyond their bloc of key supporters and to build alliances with other candidates for second and third preference exchanges. This would potentially strengthen political parties as well, by encouraging electoral alliances (May, Wheen & Haley 2013).

Increasing women's representation was not the main objective of electoral system reform in Papua New Guinea, but it was an issue of

concern both within the country and globally. The move to LPV was seen as beneficial to women, in that it would increase female voters' freedom of choice (Haley & Dierikx 2013). In a political context where voter intimidation and bloc voting were commonplace, voters—especially women voters—often faced pressured from their family or community to vote for a certain candidate. It was hypothesised that under LPV, voters would have more freedom to allocate their second and third preferences. The argument that this would benefit female candidates rests on the assumption that female voters would, in the absence of intimidation or coercion, be predisposed to vote for women. This is of course not necessarily true (Baker 2017a).

There were warnings of potential negative impacts of the shift to LPV. Fraenkel (2004, p. 127) wrote 'The adoption of preferential voting is likely to put extraordinary pressure on Papua New Guinea's electoral administration.' It was predicted that the election process would be more expensive (Kaiulo 2002; Standish 2002); that processes would become more complicated for voters and electoral staff (Fraenkel 2004; Standish 2002); and that there would be a rise in invalid votes (Fraenkel 2004). Prior to implementation, critics of the proposed reform cast doubt that it would achieve some of its aims, such as lower candidate numbers and greater cooperation between political individuals and groups (Standish 2002).

Nevertheless, public expectations were high surrounding the shift to LPV. The shift to LPV was approached not just as a technical change but as a move that would transform the political culture of Papua New Guinea (Standish 2006). Electoral system reform would bring order to what was a 'disorderly democracy' (May 2003). Part of this transformation would be the increased engagement of women, as (autonomous) voters and as parliamentarians.

4. The 2007 election

For the most part, the high expectations attached to LPV have not been met in Papua New Guinea elections since 2002. In the initial by-elections under LPV and in the 2007

election, it was noted that candidates showed little understanding of the new LPV system (May, When & Haley 2013; Standish 2006). The expected cooperation between candidates in preference exchange was not evident in the early days of LPV (Standish 2006; Haley & Anere 2009). In the 2007 election, candidates were wary of giving instructions on how to distribute preferences to their supporters, suggesting that even where strategy could be employed by candidates it was seen as a potential risk that could detract from a campaign (May, When & Haley 2013). There was less election-related violence reported than in the past, although more security was in place, especially in Southern Highlands in the 2007 election (May, When & Haley 2013; see also Reilly 2006; Standish 2006). In 2007, 2,759 candidates nominated, including 101 women. This was the first time since 1964 that candidate numbers had decreased from the previous election; candidate numbers, however, were still relatively high, with up to 69 candidates contesting a single seat.

The 2007 general election was not the first time LPV had been used in Papua New Guinea; 10 national by-elections held between 2003 and 2006 in Papua New Guinea used the system. Reviewing the six earliest by-elections under LPV, Standish (2006) notes lower rates of intimidation than in the previous general election, with voters claiming to feel free to exercise their second and third preferences. This was especially true of women, although there was no apparent associated advantage to women candidates (Standish 2006). Winning candidate mandates in these early by-elections increased from past national elections (Reilly 2006) but were still under 30 per cent in most cases. In the two cases in which mandates were closer to 50 per cent, the seats were won by 'especially strong candidates' with high-profile political connections (Standish 2006, p. 201). It was predicted that the new system would lead to a higher rate of invalid votes (Fraenkel 2004), but this was not evident in the initial by-elections under LPV (Reilly 2006).

The 2007 election was largely disappointing in terms of outcomes for women (Sepoe 2013). Under LPV, any advantages gained in the

distribution of preferences were offset by a poor first preference vote, leading to an exclusion early in the counting process (Anere & When 2013). Ultimately, the results for women in 2007 were the same as 2002; a sole woman was elected, Dame Carol Kidu in Moresby South Open. While Kidu won under the LPV system, she was not particularly advantaged by it. She won fewer preferences overall than the man who eventually placed second, but a strong first preference vote count ensured her victory (Anere & When 2013).

Kidu's experience was not unique. In the 2007 election, the vast majority of successful candidates—approximately four out of five—were the leaders after the first preference count in their constituency (May, When & Haley 2013). This suggests that in most cases, LPV did not substantively change outcomes; the winner under LPV would have most likely also been the winner had the election taken place under a FPP system. On average, incoming MPs had the support of one-third of voters at the final tally (May, When & Haley 2013). This was an improvement on the one-fifth average mandate in 2002 but still far short of a majority.

Reports from the 2007 election suggested that the shift to LPV had increased the prevalence of vote-buying. While a trend towards increased money politics had been observed under FPP (Standish 1996), LPV offered more opportunities for those selling their votes; under LPV, voters were able to elicit cash in exchange for votes from up to three candidates in a constituency, whereas before, they could only vote for one candidate (Gibbs 2013; Haley & Dierikx 2013). Furthermore, where candidates were allowed more freedom of movement in the LPV environment, they were obliged to pay for the privilege; more access to voters generally meant more demands for payment (Haley & Dierikx 2013).

Assessing the impact of LPV on the 2007 election, May, When and Haley (2013, p. 203) wrote 'The general consensus seems to be that LPV has been a qualified success, though it has not, at this stage, done much to change deeply rooted patterns of behaviour in much of the country.' This analysis was

echoed by scholars discussing women's experiences in particular: 'LPV did little or nothing to change the perception and mindset of women voters The cultural and social environment remains largely unchanged' (Sepoe 2013, p. 143; see also Gibbs 2013). Men still asserted dominance of women's electoral choices in areas where that behaviour was observed in the past. While LPV may have increased women's vote share overall due to distribution of preferences (May, Wheen & Haley 2013), it did not substantively change outcomes in the vast majority of cases, so its impact on women's representation overall was nil.

5. The 2012 election

The 2012 election saw a huge rise in the number of candidates contesting. Overall, 3,435 candidates contested, a 25 per cent increase, including 135 women. The small dip in the number of candidates in 2007, therefore, seemed an aberration rather than an indication of an emerging trend. While most candidates were able to move around freely, the campaign period was not as calm as 2007 (Haley & Zubrinich 2013), another sign that the apparent improvements of the first LPV election were temporary.

The 2012 election showed that electoral administration was indeed slower and more costly in the LPV era (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). Furthermore, ethnic divisions remained salient and evident in campaign activities, even where LPV had improved the electoral dividends for cross-ethnic campaigning. There was little evidence of alliances between candidates or preference-swapping deals (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). While there was less overt violence than in past elections, the 2012 election was generally considered to be more violent than 2007 (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). Incumbent turnover in 2012 was consistent with that of pre-LPV elections, suggesting voter satisfaction with their MPs had not increased (Wood 2017c).

Over three-quarters of winning candidates in the 2012 election were leading after first preferences were counted (Wood 2017a). Again, this

suggests that LPV did not change electoral outcomes in the vast majority of cases. Two of the cases where the distribution of preferences did change the outcome, however, were in electorates won by women.

The 2012 election was something of a watershed for women's representation. Prior to the election, there had been a sustained and high-profile campaign to introduce reserved seats for women in the Papua New Guinea Parliament (Baker 2014). While the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful in instituting reserved seats, it did prompt a national debate on women's political under-representation. There was significant media attention on the issue and a roadshow coordinated by the National Council of Women visited all of the provinces in the country to support the reserved seats campaign. A then-record number of female candidates stood in the subsequent election, and three were elected—the best result for women since the 1977 election.

Only one of the women elected in 2012, Delilah Gore in Sohe Open, was also leading on first preferences. The two other winning female candidates—Julie Soso in Eastern Highlands Provincial and Loujaya Kouza (then Toni) in Lae Open—placed fourth and fifth on first preferences, respectively, but were able to gain enough second and third preferences to win their seats. While the success of Soso and Kouza show the potential benefits of LPV for female candidates, in many ways, they are the exceptions that prove the rule. The average first preference vote share of female candidates in 2012 was less than 2 per cent (Wood 2017c). In general, female candidates won slightly more preferences than their male counterparts, but not enough to overcome a low first preference vote (Wood 2017b). Thus, LPV did not advantage the typical woman candidate in 2012, but in a few cases, it did help women to win. In those cases, the winning female candidates had strong first preference votes and favourable conditions. In the Lae Open seat, for example, the elimination of incumbent MP Bart Philemon, a close relative of Kouza's, in the last exclusion, directed a large amount of preferences to Kouza and secured her victory.

Gifting and vote-buying were commonplace in 2012, with candidates who participated in these activities in general out-performing other candidates (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). The level of money politics practiced in 2012 reflected experiences in the 2007 election and demonstrated a clear trend in post-LPV elections. The practice of money politics was an accepted and often very public facet of campaigning; in several electorates signs reading 'Votes for Sale' were observed (Haley & Zubrinich 2015).² There was evidence that LPV had increased the prevalence of vote-buying but also democratised it somewhat. Gifts and cash were generally distributed to individual voters rather than key powerbrokers (Haley & Zubrinich 2015).

Overall, the 2012 election was a relatively good result for women candidates, but how clearly this can be linked to the introduction of LPV is unclear. In terms of women's participation as voters, there was high voter turnout for women, but they were more likely than men to have assistance forced upon them and to not fill out their own ballot paper (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). The promise of more freedom of choice under LPV, therefore, is elusive. The other 'benefits' of LPV seen in 2007—fewer candidates, less violence and greater co-operation between candidates—were largely rolled back. Furthermore, the 2012 election demonstrated a proliferation of money politics, with predictions that LPV would eventually reduce gifting (Kaupa 2013) not borne out by evidence. If anything, the experience of 2012 seemed to suggest the opposite: that preferential voting was 'fuelling money politics' (Haley & Zubrinich 2015, p. 2).

6. The 2017 election

The 2017 election saw further erosion in the overarching electoral environment. At a debrief for leaders of domestic observation teams in August 2017 in Port Moresby, numerous participants described 2017 as the worst of

the post-LPV elections. Among incidents in 2017 were the attempted murders of key electoral officials, attempted kidnappings of winning candidates and electoral officials, a premature declaration in the Southern Highlands Provincial seat before counting had concluded, a double declaration in the Moresby North-West Open seat and severe instances of election-related violence resulting in over 100 deaths.

In this tense and insecure electoral environment, there were significant issues with the inclusiveness of the election, especially in terms of women's participation. Reports from the Highlands region especially described an election in which women were unable to participate equal to men (Commonwealth Observer Group 2017; TIPNG 2017). In 2017, young women were particularly disenfranchised (Commonwealth Observer Group 2017). While there were supposed to be separate polling booths for women in every polling station—to reduce the possibility of intimidation of female voters—this was not the case in most polling stations (TIPNG 2017).

While the introduction of LPV has not resulted in an increase of informal votes, as some observers predicted (Fraenkel 2004), it has seen higher levels of assisted voting (Commonwealth Observer Group 2017). How much of this assistance is forced is unclear, but we know from previous elections that women are more likely to have assistance forced upon them in polling booths (Haley & Zubrinich 2013). Where women were assisted to vote in 2017, it is usually by a man or group of men (Commonwealth Observer Group 2017).

The 2017 elections saw money politics play a significant role, as in 2007 and 2012. Instances of voters being offered or soliciting payment in exchange for their vote were commonly reported (TIPNG 2017). It appears from initial analysis that money politics was not distributed as evenly as previous elections, even if the amount of money distributed overall appears consistent. This represents a shift in the practice of money politics, rolling back the 'democratisation' seen in 2012, where individual voters were able to benefit. While money politics continues to be

2. Photos of similar signs were disseminated on the social media site Twitter during the 2017 election campaign period.

prevalent, the benefits in 2017 were predominantly directed to key powerbrokers.

The 2017 election saw women's representation in Parliament decrease from three to zero. This marked the worst result in the post-LPV era. While the outcome for women was disappointing, there were numerous women who performed very well even if they did not ultimately win. Among these high performers were incumbent MP for Sohe Open Delilah Gore, who placed second out of 42 candidates; Rufina Peter in Central Provincial, who placed third out of 27 candidates; and Kessy Sawang in Rai Coast Open, who placed third out of 37 candidates. Yet none of these high-performing women candidates benefited from preference distribution in a way that would have won them the election.

Gore, in Sohe Open, was the leader on the first preference count, as she was in the 2012 election. Unlike in 2012, however, the preference distributions in 2017 eroded rather than consolidated her lead. On the final preference count, she lost by fewer than 200 votes. If we use the first preference count as a proxy for a plurality majoritarian voting system, Gore would have won both elections under FPP. In 2012, LPV preference flows secured her win; in 2017, the preference votes were a disadvantage.

In the Central Provincial race, Peter came third on first preferences with 12 per cent of the vote, behind the eventual winner on 17 per cent, and the incumbent MP on 15 per cent. While she received roughly the same ratio of preference votes as the eventual winner, he was able to maintain his original lead throughout the count. In this race, as in many others, the counting of preferences did not fundamentally change the result.

Female candidates in the 2017 election reported a 'drier' election in many parts of the country—meaning less money changing hands during the campaign—perhaps reflecting the dire economic situation of Papua New Guinea in 2017. In these areas, women felt they were less disadvantaged than they might have been otherwise; in the late stages of the campaign, however, money politics was allegedly practiced, with key

influential figures within the community or electoral officials the main recipients of largesse (Baker 2017b). While the practice of money politics may have adapted, it has not disappeared, leaving intact an uneven electoral environment that is biased against women, who tend to have fewer financial resources than their higher-performing male counterparts (Barbara & Baker 2016).

7. Limited preferential voting and women's electoral chances

As seen earlier, women's electoral chances have not increased substantially since the introduction of LPV. Women's political representation, as in the past, has progressed unevenly, in fits and starts amidst setbacks. This is largely due to the fact that LPV does not change outcomes in the vast majority of cases. In the 2007 and 2012 elections, between 76 and 80 per cent of seats were won by the candidate who was leading after the first preference count. In LPV elections, the first preference vote remains the key determinant of success.

These findings are consistent with the results from LPV elections held in Bougainville, an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea. In the 2010 and 2015 Autonomous Bougainville Government election, only 7.5 and 12.5 per cent of successful candidates, respectively, were not leading on first preference count (Baker 2015). They are also consistent with results from elections using the similar AV system in neighbouring countries Fiji and Australia. Fiji adopted an AV electoral system in its 1997 constitution (abrogated in 2009 and replaced in 2013); in the 2006 election, the last held using AV, the candidate leading on first preferences was the winner in all but two seats (97.2%) (Fraenkel & Firth 2007). In the 2013 Australian election, the distribution of preferences did not alter the final result in 135 out of 150 House of Representatives seats (90%) (Green 2015).

The introduction of LPV has also not done much to ameliorate underlying issues relating to political culture that hinder women's equal participation in elections. Women in Papua

New Guinea elections remain vulnerable to intimidation and forced assistance. Of course, if women were allowed greater freedom of choice in elections, it would not necessarily follow that they would vote for women; yet the issues are not entirely unrelated. The constrained participation of women in Papua New Guinea elections and the under-representation of women in Papua New Guinea politics are two sides of the same coin, both results of an electoral environment that is male-dominated and hostile to women.

Of course, some women have been successful in Papua New Guinea politics, and research on Pacific women in politics has shown that other key factors—including family connections, wealth and social status—can effectively trump gender in some cases, even in very patriarchal societies (Corbett & Liki 2015). Furthermore, a political career is not a goal for all women who want to effect societal change (Spark & Corbett 2016). Nevertheless, for the vast majority of those that choose to contest, a ‘double burden’ of patriarchal norms and money politics proves insurmountable. This is due to both male and female voters: both participate in money politics (Haley & Zubrinich 2013); not all women in Papua New Guinea believe that women belong in the political sphere; and many female voters may be uninterested in advancing the political ambitions of elite women (Sepoe 1996).

There is a mixed report card on many of the anticipated benefits of LPV. There has been no repeat of violence on the scale of the 2002 general elections, but we have not seen a consistent decline in the level of violence and insecurity in Papua New Guinea elections. Candidate numbers, bar a small decrease in 2007, have not gone down; in 2017, there were a record 3,340 candidates, an average of 30 per seat. The political party system remains weak and fragmented. Cooperation between candidates is minimal, and while members are elected with larger mandates, almost all fall short of a majority.

Papua New Guinea elections under LPV have proved costlier, and counting is a slow and fraught process. Furthermore, since the

introduction of LPV money politics has proliferated; vote-buying, gifting and the manipulation of electoral processes through bribery has been reported as pervasive in all post-LPV elections. This has created a political playing field that is further biased against women, entrenching male dominance of parliament and negating any perceived advantages of the LPV system for women.

That is not to say LPV does not have any benefits. The main objective of the change was to produce broader mandates for members of Parliament. While in most instances, LPV does not change the overall result, if the results are perceived to be more legitimate by the general public due to the preferential system, it could still be worthwhile. Wood (2017b) has found that LPV does slightly advantage female candidates in that they tend to receive more preferences than men; yet it does not substantively change outcomes so does not benefit women in any material way in a patriarchal political system. While LPV has assisted women in winning seats in several isolated instances—namely, Soso and Kouza in 2012—it has also disadvantaged women, as with Gore in 2017, or more often than not made no difference to their electoral chances.

Proposals to adapt the LPV system have been mooted, such as introducing weighted preferences (May, Wheen & Haley 2013). While this may lead to different outcomes, it would do nothing to decrease the cost of elections or the length of counting periods. The electoral systems that global evidence tells us most advantage female candidates, closed list proportional representation systems (Rule 1994), would be unworkable in the fragmented and weak party system of Papua New Guinea.

Fundamentally, electoral system reform can only do so much, as changing the formal rules of the game is only one part of the story. Institutional reforms are layered onto existing rules and norms, related to political culture and electoral behaviour, that are firmly established and unyielding; these existing institutions can hinder or even subvert the goals of reform. In Papua New Guinea, this broad political context includes the widespread acceptance of money

politics as part of the political system, and a patriarchal political culture that works against women. Thus, the limitations of any electoral system reform in producing significant gains for women are clear.

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